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[Timor excerpts only]
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SPECIAL DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE TAKES UP EAST TIMOR AND WESTERN SAHARA

To achieve a successful transition to East Timorese independence, it would be useful for all parties concerned to set a date for elections and independence, the representative of Portugal said this afternoon as the Special Committee on Decolonization heard petitioners on the question of East Timor.

He stressed the need for a compromise between the time required to achieve the necessary conditions of self-governance for the new State, and the need not to prolong the role of the United Nations in the Territory's administration. While peace had been maintained and the humanitarian situation had improved significantly, the reconstruction of infrastructure, the rehabilitation of the economy and the establishment of all the systems necessary for the normal functioning of a modern and democratic State represented a huge challenge for the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET).

The representative of Indonesia, noting the need to separate fact from fiction, said attention should now be focused on the future of East Timor as it embarked on the road to independence. Despite the difficult financial crisis Indonesia had undergone last year, it had still given assistance to East Timorese refugees on its territory.

He expressed disappointment at a decision by humanitarian agencies to suspend their work in refugee camps following cross-border attacks by militias. Indonesia condemned all violence from any quarter. The violence had been contained and agreement had been reached between authorities and refugee leaders on preventing further incidents.

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Representatives of political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) read petitions on the question of East Timor. Those organizations were the International Federation for East Timor; Catholic Institute for International Relations; Commission for the Rights of the Maubere People; International Platform of Jurists for East Timor; Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor; Volunteers for International Solidarity; Swedish East Timor Committee; Socialist Party of Portugal; Social Democratic Party of Portugal; Popular Party of Portugal; Communist Party of Portugal; and East Timor Network/United States.

The Special Committee on Decolonization will meet again at 10 a.m. tomorrow, Thursday, 6 July, to continue its hearing of petitioners.

Committee Work Programme

The Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples met this afternoon to begin its consideration of the questions of Western Sahara and East Timor.

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The Committee was also expected to consider a working paper on East Timor (document (A/AC.109/2000/12), which had not yet been issued at the time of the meeting.

Statements

When the Committee turned to the question of East Timor, SANTANA CARLOS (Portugal) noted that the issue had been neglected throughout Indonesia's illegal occupation of the Territory. Portugal appreciated the efforts of the petitioners who had, through the years, referred to the plight of East Timor's people in the Special Committee. They had helped raise international awareness, which had been decisive in attaining a political solution to the question of East Timor.

He said that while his country had been prevented from exercising its responsibilities as administering Power by the illegal occupation of East Timor in 1975, Portugal had always cooperated with the Special Committee. Although it had not had access to the Territory, it had still made available to the Special Committee information from independent sources on the situation in East Timor.

While peace had been maintained and the humanitarian situation had improved significantly, he said that very challenging tasks still lay ahead. The promotion of social and political stability would depend very much on the pace of reconstruction and on establishing an effective administration. The reconstruction of infrastructure, the rehabilitation of the economy and the establishment of all the systems necessary for the normal functioning of a modern and democratic State represented a huge challenge for the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET).

He said that for East Timor's transition to independence to succeed, it would be useful for all parties to set a date for elections as well as for independence. There should be a compromise between the time required to achieve the necessary conditions of self-governance for the new State, and the need not to prolong the role of the United Nations as the entity responsible for the Territory's administration.

CHARLES SCHEINER, of the International Federation for East Timor, said that his organization welcomes the plans of Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello to incorporate more East Timorese into political and technical positions within the Transitional Administration. It is long overdue -- for the past eight months, the people of East Timor have made do with international technocrats who lack relevant training and experience, and the situation is getting worse as East Timor becomes a less desirable posting within the United Nations system. It was particularly important to provide a role for members of the Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor (FALINTIL) members in security and police forces.

He furthermore urged the international community and the Indonesian Government to take decisive action to allow the return of East Timorese from their plight as virtual hostages in refugee camps in West Timor. This was not an Indonesian domestic problem. The people in question were never citizens of Indonesia under international law and thus were abducted by foreign troops into a neighbouring country.

Related to refugee problem, he said, was the failure of the international community to bring those responsible for crimes against the people of East Timor to justice. This morning, the International Federation for East Timor and dozens of other organizations delivered a letter to the Secretary-General, urging the Security Council to take immediate steps to establish an international tribunal for East Timor.

He said, however, that it is not only the Indonesian military that bore responsibility for the crimes committed in East Timor between 1975 and 1999. The United Nations, particularly States members of the Security Council, shared the blame for complicity and inaction up to last year. Thus it was incumbent for the international community to commit significant funding to East Timor, as necessary, over an extended period of time.

IGNACIO HARDING, on behalf of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, called for attention to be paid to the aspirations and desires of the women of East Timor. Women, he said, were essential to repairing the torn fabric of East Timorese society and had taken the lead in community organizing and other efforts.

He said that the first East Timorese Women's Congress had taken place from 14 to 17 June this year, bringing together around 700 women, including representatives of major organizations. The Congress had called upon a free East Timor to sign onto the principles the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

He conveyed the request of the Congress for UNTAET and the post-transition government to provide adequate resources to make the empowerment and advancement of women a reality in East Timor. He also relayed their call for an international tribunal and adequate safeguards for witness protection to be built into new legislation for women giving evidence regarding rape and other sexual crimes, as well as their call for a truth and reconciliation commission.

The objective, he said, was to combat the culture of violence and build the capacity of women to achieve equal rights and participation. In addition, vulnerable groups such as widows, orphans, the disabled, survivors of violence, the elderly and sex workers must be supported and assisted by both the government and the community.

FRANK FITZGERALD, Commission for the Rights of the Maubere People, said that as the East Timorese moved towards independence, they faced major hurdles and were relying on the international community's support to overcome them. The most evident was the displacement of large sectors of the population and the considerable material destruction perpetrated during and after the referendum.

He said many of the displaced persons had previously been public servants in the Indonesian administration. Before they left Indonesian territory with their families, they wanted assurances that their retirement entitlements would be honoured. The existence of sizeable colonies of exiles (15 per cent of East Timor's population) could constitute a destabilizing factor in the medium- and long-term. It was an issue that must be addressed urgently.

The international community should continue its calls for the militias to be disarmed and removed from the refugee camps, he said. In order to prevent destabilization attempts by militias and by the Indonesian military associated with them, civilian and democratic forces in Indonesia itself must be strengthened. It was those forces that the international community should be supporting, not the armed forces, as had happened during the time of President Suharto. Prosecution of those responsible for abuses in East Timor was also a key factor in supporting change in Indonesia and stability in the region.

VANESSA RAMOS, International Platform of Jurists for East Timor, stressed the need to bring to justice those responsible for the abuses committed during and after last year's popular consultation, as well as those who had committed atrocities since the invasion of 1975. There was concern that impartial trials would prove impossible and that laws of closure would be enacted. An international tribunal should be constituted if it proved impossible to hold a fair trial under national jurisdiction.

She said that in order to begin the process of reconciliation, the United Nations must demand from Indonesia the repatriation of displaced persons now in West Timor and ensure the open provision of humanitarian assistance to them. The United Nations must support the process of reconstruction. Any treaty concluded by Indonesia on the exploitation of natural resources, such as the agreement with Australia on the "Timor Gap", should be cancelled.

AUGUSTO MICLAT JR., of the Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor, said that there were still urgent concerns that needed to be addressed despite East Timor's nominal independence. First, he said, 120,000 refugees needed to be allowed to choose freely and without fear whether they wished to return to East Timor. The United Nations should employ all means at its disposal to effect this. Second, an international tribunal must be established as a warning to other would-be tyrants, to salvage the remnants of United Nations prestige and to apply the balm of justice to East Timor.

Equally important, he said, were moves by the United Nations to "fast track" the so-called "Timorization" of the transition civil service. Decentralization, the assurance of participation by women, and inclusion of East Timorese political leaders such as Xanana Gusmao and Jose Ramos were all factors that should be considered.

The dual economy of high-wage internationals versus impoverished locals had marginalized the local population and should be dealt with, he continued. Urban development had been overly emphasized -- it needed to be balanced by more rural and agricultural programmes. Humanitarian assistance should be maintained. International aid should continue as grants rather than loans to allow the new country to be born debt-free. Development assistance should be linked to government statutes that promoted human rights, justice, peace-building and reconciliation. Finally, community empowerment should also be encouraged, as should the empowerment of women, the promotion of children's interests and protection of the environment and natural resources.

VIVEK ANANTHAN of the Volunteers for International Solidarity appealed to the United Nations to mobilize support for an expedient and concentrated effort for social and economic growth and development in East Timor; security against invasions and attacks from neighbouring countries; and a guarantee of safety for the people to live in peace. Assistance was also necessary for the redevelopment of the country, recognition of workers' rights, a minimum wage, free education and health care for every citizen.

As the highest international organization in the world, the United Nations had the power and resources to assist the citizens of East Timor. Decisions should be based on humanitarian goals and not on the influence of great Powers who manipulated and exploited weaker countries for financial gain. The rebuilding and redevelopment of East Timor must be implemented according to the needs of the people and not according to the greed of global investors.

ADAM MINSON, of the Swedish East Timor Committee, welcomed the United Nations role in the decolonization process in East Timor. In Sweden, solidarity with East Timor had intensified in the past few years, with the Swedish Government providing political and financial support.

He said his organization wanted the Special Committee to highlight the following issues: the establishment of an internationally recognized court in Indonesia to charge the officers and officials responsible for the violence during 1999; the immediate repatriation of East Timorese nationals still remaining in West Timor; and the need for support from the international community for nation- building.

RICARDO CASTANHEIRA, Socialist Party of Portugal, said that East Timor was halfway to independence, and that despite certain successes in the Territory, some forms of external dependency were a means of denying liberty.

He said that this year would hopefully be the final year for the Special Committee to hear petitions on behalf of East Timor. After 25 years of suffering, independence could not be considered simply as political freedom. The people could not be quantified simply in terms of dead and wounded. The struggle had been difficult, but it was one that was giving shape to freedom and political self-determination as well as economic and social well-being.

He said that at the time that the negative effects of globalization and liberalization were being discussed, the case of East Timor had the potential to be a paradigm for development in the future. The generous promises of international assistance made after the referendum must materialize. It was essential to integrate the Timorese into the management and administration of their own country and not to marginalize them.

The question of refugees and displaced persons in West Timor was a powder keg, he said. They lived in subhuman conditions and were often under pressure from the Indonesian population. Abandoning them to their fate would be a recipe for disaster.

NATALIA CARASCALAO, Social Democratic Party of Portugal, said that the decolonization process after the Second World War continued to be written with the firm determination of the United Nations. Cooperation must continue for the construction of a new nation.

Following the euphoria of the referendum victory, support for East Timor might begin to dwindle while there was still so much to do, she said. The situation in the Territory showed clearly how much remained to be done. There were a number of positive signs, but still several problems to be solved. The UNTAET and all Timorese society must move forward as one.

She said that FALINTIL, which had been instrumental in the long struggle for self-determination, should form the core of the armed forces of an independent East Timor.

MIGUEL ANACORETA CORREIA, Popular Party of Portugal, said he had been a member of a parliamentary delegation that had visited East Timor last April and met with members of UNTAET as well as local leaders and people's representatives. The systematic and generalized destruction of property before and during the referendum proved that it had been intentional.

He expressed concern over the delay in defining the status of FALINTIL, which should constitute the nucleus of a new armed forces. It was necessary to follow up the situation and for the international community to know what East Timor needed. Support for the militias in West Timor must be ended and safe corridors opened to allow refugees to return home.

He said it was always difficult to pass from an emergency situation to normalcy. Donors must be told that any delay in implementing their pledges of assistance would jeopardize any progress that had already been made. The international community must show proof of its generosity as East Timor entered a particularly sensitive phase.

BERNADINO SOARES, Member of the Portuguese Communist Party, expressed concern at the slow progress in rebuilding the country along with its structures and main institutions. He called for a United Nations guarantee that conditions for economic independence would be reached in East Timor.

Important steps toward this goal, he said, would be UNTAET's fostering of greater participation of Timorese in the current administration, and allowing the Timorese to make their own decisions regarding all important matters, including currency, official language, security and armed forces. Also, the status of FALINTIL must be quickly resolved, as must a procedure to establish elections and political parties.

JOHN MILLER, East Timor Network/United States, said that due to a combination of arrogance, bureaucratic bungling, procedural delays and incompetence, UNTAET had only just begun to progress towards a genuine partnership with the East Timorese people in running their country. The Special Committee and Member States must closely monitor and, where necessary, criticize UNTAET in its oversight of physical reconstruction and political institution-building.

He said there remained unfinished issues of concern, including the questions of the refugees and the security of the border with West Timor. Refugees remained under threat from militia leaders and members of the Indonesian military. Intimidation and tension were palpable, while misinformation continued to allege horrific conditions and massive abuses by international forces in East Timor.

Growing tension between some refugees and the local population should provide an incentive for the Indonesian Government to responsibly resolve the status of the refugees. But the continued interest of militia leaders and some elements of the Indonesian military in maintaining control over the refugees was keeping the problem from being resolved, despite repeated Indonesian Government pledges to do so.

HAMZA THAYEB (Indonesia) said he wished to clear up misinformation about the situation. Attention should now be focused on the future of East Timor as it embarked on the road to independence. After the referendum, and despite the formidable challenges, Indonesia remained firmly committed to fulfilling its obligations under the 5 May Agreements.

Stressing the need to separate fact from fiction, he said that the difficult financial crisis Indonesia had undergone last year had not prevented it from giving assistance to East Timorese on its territory.

He expressed disappointment at a decision of humanitarian agencies to suspend their work in refugee camps following cross-border attacks by militias. Indonesia condemned all violence from any quarter. The violence had been contained and agreement had been reached between authorities and refugee leaders on preventing further incidents.

Regarding the refugees, he said it was completely unfounded to say that they were being prevented from returning to East Timor. The Indonesian Government had left no stone unturned in assisting them in their time of need. Indonesia was
fully aware of the complexities of the refugee situation. Severe floods last May had caused a lot of damage and an emergency had been immediately declared to alleviate the hardship. While the efforts of humanitarian agencies were commendable, they were not enough to meet the urgent needs of the refugees. Indonesia appealed for contributions from the international community.